

Hughie Campbell is dead

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"Hughie Campbell is dead," says Mr. MacCurrie. He pauses to give me time to recover from the shock before going on with the details, for Hughie Campbell is an almost legendary figure. A decade ago, at the age of 21, he was the idol of the community's sports-minded population, which is to say virtually the entire male citizenry. A star athlete in his high school days, Campbell later played brilliant football on that never-to-be-forgotten town football team that won the "state semi-pro title" with a record of no defeats and no ties. He went on to even greater glory as an amateur boxer. Conceded by sports writers to be a definitely promising prospect, Campbell was forced to abandon boxing when a broken arm failed to heal properly. His meteoric athletic career ended, he left town shortly afterwards and has not been heard from in several years.

Gratified by my eager curiosity Mr. MacCurrie give me almost verbatim, the obituary notice from the morning paper. Campbell, it seems, had been struck by an automobile in Chicago, died without recovering consciousness in a hospital.

"He was drivin' taxi oot there, accordin' to the paper," says Mr. MacCurrie, "His mother, poor woman, was notified of his death by telegram last night. His body is on the way home by train, the paper says.

"I don't think his mother ever knew where he was. They say she hadn't heard from him in two - three years. What do you suppose he went oot there for?

Neither of us can provide a satisfactory answer, though we venture several guesses. Mr. MacCurrie relieves his perplexity with a pinch of snuff. We observe a brief period of silence as fitting tribute to the deceased.

"I was listenin' to the radio before you came," says Mr. MacCurrie "and it says they're goin' to reopen the Hines trial. They've got a new judge. I guess they'll get Hines this time, all right.

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"Not much else new. They're expectin' the survivors of that plane crash to arrive in New York same time this afternoon. Those dom things are far from safe yet. I don't think they're a goddom bit safer than they were twenty or thirty years ago, though they may be put together a bit better.

"First one I ever see around here was owned by a fella in New Britain. He flew it doon in Waterbury where the old drivin' park used to be. He didn't have it more than a hundred feet off the ground. I think it was a goddam sight safer than the ones they fly today."

Mr. MacCurrie looks out the window. Streets and sidewalks are glazed with ice and passing automobiles trail white plumes of smoke from the exhaust. It is bitterly cold, but the large old fashioned radiators in the fire house throw off comforting warmth. Mr. MacCurrie extends his hand toward the one beneath the window.

"Nice in here ain't it?" says he. "This mornin's paper said this was the worst cold wave of the year.

"They had an editorial aboot the isolation hospital. Told aboot how much it was costin' the city of Waterbury, and all that.

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Now the Democrat-tonight will have an editorial answerin' them. You wait and see. Them two papers put me in mind of a couple of goddom kids. Fightin' back and forth.

"The Republican-American's got the biggest circulation, ain't it? They sell a lot of papers in this town. 'Twas always a good town for newspapers. Of coorse they have the weekly here, but the people like to get ooutside news.

"I get it all kinds of ways. I get it in the newspapers and on the radio. A good many people seem to think the radio will take the place of newspapers in time to come, but I don't believe it. You can sit doon and listen to the programs, but you can't absorb the news--they

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give it too fast. You have to read the papers afterwards to find out what it's all about. If a man's a slow thinker, he likes to read the news and figure it out his own way.

"I like Lowell Thomas all right, but some of them goddam commentators I can't stand. I don't like this Hill and I don't like Boake Carter."

Mr. Brennan comes in. He is employed at "the Mill, and rarely stops on his way from work, but he has apparently heard the news of Hughie Campbell's death and is eager to discuss it.

"Too bad about Hughie, ain't it," he says at once. "He used to belong to the company didn't he?"

"The other side," says Mr. MacCurrie.

Mr. Brennan: "Well, I suppose they'll have a delegation at the funeral anyway. No more than right. Went pretty sudden didn't it? You never can tell, by God. When you go out of the house in the mornin' you never know whether you're comin' back at night. When's the funeral?"

Mr. MacCurrie: "The arrangements are incomplete. Very likely it'll be from the undertaker's parlors. His mother livin' in that apartment with Clara, they won't have no place to hold it. Don't know as it makes much goddam difference --not that I mean any disrespect to Hughie---but when you're buried you're buried. No matter how much rigamarole they go through, you're a long time dead."

Mr. Brennan: "It hardly seems possible, such a young, strong lad. I remember when he was just a little black headed kid runnin' around over there on Grove Street. I used to live over there, same time his family did. He was a lively little bugger, them days, they used to call him 'Punk' or 'Pest' or some such name."

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Mr. MacCurrie: "He was a dom good football player."

Mr. Brennan: "He was a good hearted lad. Give you the shirt off his back. My lad used to run around with him. I wouldn't be surprised if they asked him to be one of the bearers."

Mr. MacCurrie: "Well, here comes the boy with the paper. We'll have to see what they say about it tonight." He gets up, opens the door a few inches, letting in a draft of cold air while he waits for the paper boy. Mr. Brennan, who is standing directly in line with the door, shivers, frowns at Mr. MacCurrie's back. "Guess I'll go home," he says, "Read my paper. I don't like to read it here, because then I ain't got nothing to read when I get home."